

CURRENT SOCIETAL CONCERNS: INTRODUCTION

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In defining applied behavior analysis more than a quarter century ago, Baer, Wolf, and Risley (1968) presented it as the study of changing "behaviors which are socially important" (p. 92).¹ One goal of Nancy Neef, as editor of *JABA*, has been to facilitate an enlarged scope for our field, so that more of the socially important behaviors of the 1990s might be addressed. Clearly, we behavior analysts are already addressing the numerous socially and personally important problems associated with developmental disability with remarkable skill and commitment. We are also addressing many other socially important problems, some of them quite extensively, such as the effectiveness of education (e.g., Spring 1992 special issue of *JABA*; Greer, 1991; Johnson & Layng, 1992; Keller, 1968), various safety issues (e.g., Lehman & Geller, 1990; Peterson & Schick, 1993), and how health-promoting behavior can be developed (Bunck & Iwata, 1978; Montesinos, Frisch, Greene, & Hamilton, 1990; Winett et al., 1991). Although not all of these works appear in *JABA*, the important thing is that behavior analysts are doing the work, and it is being made available to the scientific community.

But there appear to be profound social problems that are not getting the attention from ap-

plied behavior analysts that their importance would suggest. Candidates for a list of such problems include the spread of weapons of mass destruction; irreversible environmental degradation; teenage pregnancy; discrimination and cruel ethnocentrism in many parts of the world; violence, especially in large cities; increasing tensions and rifts throughout world and American society; homelessness of individuals and families; physical, sexual, and psychological abuse of women and children; abuse of many kinds of substances; the rising cost of health care; declining job security; how to use the influence of the press (or other public media) to good ends (cf. Pennypacker, 1992); certain detrimental effects of media; and so on.

Of course we behavior analysts are a small group, compared to the number and magnitude of the problems. Also, our research methods may not be well adapted to addressing certain problems experimentally. Further, we may hold every manuscript up to a set of methodological standards that preclude the publication of work on certain problems in *JABA*, regardless of how groundbreaking it may be or how systemic an issue it may address, thereby making it less likely that behavior analysts will even address those problems.

Whatever factors restrict the work of behavior analysts or their submission of that work to *JABA*, a call for manuscripts dealing with current societal concerns yielded articles that do break new ground in terms of the problem ad-

¹ We would like to add "or personally" to that criterion, because some behaviors are of little or no importance to anyone but the person who emits them. Anxiety and avoidance behaviors are examples in certain persons.

dressed or the way that it is addressed. The following special section presents both research and discussion articles that we hope will inspire others to expand their work in ways that will address these and other profound problems in our society today. We hope that a similar special section in an issue of *JABA* in about 2005 will demonstrate progress in the range of problems addressed and the methods of addressing them.

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